

Coalition For Prisoners' Rights Newsletter

Vol. 46-C, No. 6

PO Box 1911, Santa Fe NM 87504

June 2021

SOME POSITIVE CHANGES

New York - At the beginning of May, Gov. Cuomo of New York state signed S830//A4448 into law, codifying voting rights for people on parole who had been barred from voting due to Jim Crow-era disenfranchisement laws. A big win, this legislative change clarifies that everyone who is in the community (and is 18 years old and a citizen) is eligible to vote by law. People in prison are still prohibited from voting. So, there is more work to do!

Louisiana - Nearly 42% of those who are released from Louisiana state prisons return within 5 years. For 6 years however, a reentry agency, the First 72+ (established by formally incarcerated men The name comes from evidence showing that the first 72 hours out are good predictors of who will stay out) have helped every single one of the 176 people who have passed through their houses, stay out.

Ironically, although Louisiana continues to lead the nation in per capita prison population, since 2017, the prison population has fallen by nearly one-quarter, from more than 35,000 to 26,517. Resource: 72+, 2917 Perdido St., New Orleans LA 70119, 504-324-8859.

Illinois - The *Solidarity Building Initiative* (SBI) of McCormick Theological Seminary runs a "liberative" higher education program at an Illinois county jail which works to help its students think how they can change things. It's second, longer-term goal is to end the harm that the current incarceration system inflicts on individuals and society. It works to provide resources for intellectual and spiritual growth to women and men on the inside and on disrupting the unjust economic, social, and political barriers on the outside that have resulted in our country locking up more than any other country."

Resource: McCormick Theological Seminary, 5460 S. University, Chicago IL 60615, 773-947-6300.

"Immigrants have unalienable human rights. They are the victims of colonial economics and white supremacy politics."

- L.A., Santa Fe New Mexican

SERIOUS MAIL TAMPERING

The fundamental right of sending and receiving mail has long been restricted in a variety of ways by penal institutions. And now, the ante is going up drastically. First of all, it is being privatized, then completely controlled, and also destroyed. These changes come under more than one name: the first we knew about affected only Pennsylvania, in 2018 - where it is sent to a company called *Smart Communications*, which is actually located in Florida. It has now appeared at at least one federal prison. Florida is actively planning to implement this new method of control. Massachusetts may well be next.

As we know, mail is essential to incarcerated people's safety, emotional health and relative well being in prison. It looks like it will result in more hurdles for maintaining connections between people in prison and those outside, as well as add additional burdens and costs to those locked up and their loved ones. The federal government's use of what they call "Mail Guard" in Bureau of Prisons facilities could speed such programs' spread to state prisons and county jails nationwide.

The plan for Florida prisons was announced at the end of May. Regular mail sent to those imprisoned will be processed and reviewed by a third-party vendor, which will then scan it to electronically provide it to the addressees via tablets or shared "kiosks." So, it would eliminate incarcerated people's access to their actual physical mail. Also, it would extend the time which officials are authorized to take to provide someone's mail to them from 48 to 72 hours. Recipients are supposed to be able to reprint their photocopied letter or photo at 25 cents per page, or \$1 for a page in color. JPay, Inc now provides the tablets.

Resources: *Just Detention International*, 3325 Wilshire Blvd. - Suite 340, Los Angeles CA 90010; *Innocence Project of Florida, Inc.*, 1100 East Park Ave., Tallahassee FL 32301, 850-561-6767.

Creciente violencia contra los asiáticos

El asesinato de seis mujeres asiáticas en Atlanta fue un rudo recordatorio de la historia de violence racista de Estados Unidos contra las comunidades asiático-americanas e isleñas del Pacífico (AAPI, por sus siglas en inglés). Dichos asesinatos fueron unos demás de 6,603 delitos dude odio contra personas AAPI denunciados en todo el país durante el año pasado. Esto es casi el doble del período anterior según Stop AAPI Hate (Paren el Odio contra los AAPI). Desde marzo de 2020 hasta marzo de 2021, se reportaron *más de 830 incidentes de violencia física* en los Estados Unidos.

Lamentablemente, el racismo actual no tiene nada de nuevo. Al fines del siglo XIX, llegaron a Estados Unidos los primeros trabajadores chinos en busca de una vida mejor. Sin embargo, se encontraron con palizas, linchamientos y restricciones legislativas racistas. Las mujeres chinas en particular fueron sometidas a un trato brutal. Le Ley Page de 1875 prohibió que las mujeres chinas emigraran a los Estados Unidos y la Ley de Exclusión China de 1882 selló la frontera. Considerados como competidores por los puestos de trabajo, este es, en parte, el origen del racismo anti-asiático, el cual tiene profundas raíces en el sistema de lucro.

Desde el internamiento de los estado-unidenses de origen japonés durante la segunda Guerra Mundial hasta los ataques actuales, la violencia ha sido una amenaza constante en la comunidad asiático-americano y de las islas del Pacífico.

THE LEAST READ PART OF THE NEWSLETTER

To receive the *CPR Newsletter* by postal mail monthly, send us a self-addressed, stamped envelope for each month's issue you are requesting, up to 12 at one time. Put the CPR return address in the upperleft-hand corner of each envelope you send.

Five pages (1 ounce) can be sent for one Forever stamp. Ten pages (2 ounces) can be sent for a twenty-cent stamp more.

Please continue to send us address changes, as soon as you can, to help us keep our mailing list up-to-date.

NONE OF US ARE LAWYERS OR LEGAL WORKERS. Letters sent to us marked "Legal Mail" can NOT be, but could result in our losing access to the prisons they come from.

Many, many thanks to the Real Cost of Prisons project, which posts our Newsletter on-line monthly for free downloading and distribution. All issues since 2009 are at its great site: realcostofprisons.org

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

By mid-2020, the number of people in *jails* (as distinguished from *prisons*) was the lowest it had been for 20 years. The number incarcerated in county jails nationally went down by 185,000, or one-quarter of the total. But, from mid-2020 to March 2021, the number of those jailed rose by 70,000, for a total near 650,000.

More than 40 people have died of Covid-19 in jails since the start of the pandemic. In prisons, the virus has killed more than 2,600 people imprisoned and 207 staff.

The Torrance County Detention Center in New Mexico, owned by CoreCivic, holds people under the jurisdiction of ICE, the U.S. Marshals Service and the local county sheriff's office. At the end of May 2021, of the 145 employees, 16 tested positive. And, 110 of those imprisoned did. At that time, no Covid-19 related deaths among either group had been reported. On June 19, in New Mexico as a whole, 1,339 cases of Covid-19 have been reported among federally detained people and 2,986 among NM imprisoned ones.

Even worse, at least 18 people died of complications from Covid-19 in Texas prisons during the first 12 months of the pandemic after they had been approved for parole. At any given time in the Texas system thousands have been approved for parole but have not yet been released because of requirements for completing rehab, treatment or life skills training. Completing these requirements on average took 3 to 4 months. But, with the pandemic, pre-release programs were postponed and typical delays jumped to 5 to 11 months.

And then there is the heat wave and the lack of air conditioning in many very hot states prisons. Not all the prisons in these states have air conditioning: Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas (only 30 of its 109 prisons are fully air conditioned) and Virginia. There is no national standard for temperatures in prisons and jails and jurisdiction over them is decentralized.

State and local governments go to astonishing lengths to avoid installing air conditioning in prisons. In 2016, Louisiana spent over \$1 million *in legal bills* to avoid installing air conditioning on death row—an amount 4 times higher than the actual cost of installing air conditioning.

Air conditioning should be considered a human right—without it, people are being subjected to cruel and unusual punishment and even, in reality, receiving death sentences.